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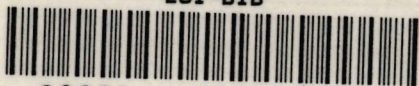
## **Single Mothers in Early Twentieth Century Sweden: Two Studies**

ELISABETH ELGAN and JAN GRÖNDAHL

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**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION**

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**ELISABETH ELGAN and JAN GRÖNDAHL**

**BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO (FI)**

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## **PART I**

### **Soins maternels et argent paternel: la loi suédoise de 1917 sur les enfants illégitimes**

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## Soins maternels et argent paternel: La loi suédoise de 1917 sur les enfants illégitimes\*

Elisabeth Elgán

Au tournant du XIXe siècle, beaucoup de pays européens changent la législation concernant les enfants illégitimes et leurs parents. En Suède, une nouvelle loi est votée dans ce domaine en 1917. Nous allons ici étudier cette législation à la lumière du débat qui l'entoure.

Ce débat est une très bonne occasion de voir comment les sexes et leurs places respectives se construisent. Pour désigner cette construction, sa hiérarchie, ses évolutions et ses significations, l'histoire des femmes a récemment eu recours au terme genre, *gender* en anglais.<sup>1</sup> La nouvelle signification que prend la maternité à l'époque qui nous intéresse ici, crée aussi une nouvelle dimension de la paternité.

L'existence de mères célibataires met en cause le modèle de l'homme, père de famille, qui donne à son épouse, gardienne du foyer, de quoi faire bouillir la marmite et éduquer leurs enfants. Des historiennes anglo-saxonnes ont mis à jour la propagation de ce modèle, qui est avant tout un idéal non une réalité, dans tous les milieux sociaux et politique à cette époque.<sup>2</sup> Des historiennes suédoises ont également vu cette tendance dans la société suédoise.<sup>3</sup> Les mères célibataires subissaient les conséquences de cette subordination économique, sociale et imaginaire des femmes. La difficulté de gagner sa vie tout en

\*Cet article est le fruit d'une étude comparative plus large qui aborde quelques réformes concernant les femmes en Suède et en France dans la première moitié du XXe siècle, menée dans le cadre d'un projet de recherche intitulé *Femmes, maternité et politique sociale en Suède 1900-1945*, financé par la Fondation tricentenaire de la Banque de Suède.

<sup>1</sup>Pour l'introduction de ce terme en français, voir "Le genre de l'histoire" Les cahiers du Grif 1988:37/38

<sup>2</sup>Lewis Jane, "Introduction" et "Dealing with Dependency: State Practices and Social Realities, 1870-1945", *Women's Welfare Women's Rights* (London, Sydney, 1983), p 1-35; Lewis Jane, "The Working-Class Wife and Mother and State Intervention, 1870-1918", *Labour and Love* (London, 1986), p 99-120; Pateman Carole, "The Patriarchal Welfare State", Gutman Amy (ed.) *Democracy and the Welfare State*, (Princeton University Press, 1988), p 231-260; Land Hilary, "The Family Wage", *Feminist Review* 1980:6; Rose Sonya O., "Gender at Work: Sex, Class and Industrial Capitalism", *History Workshop* 1986:21, p 113-131

<sup>3</sup>Carlsson Christina, *Kvinnosyn och kvinnopolitik* (Lund, 1986); Hirdman Yvonne, "Den socialistiska hemmafrun", red. Åkerman Brita, mfl *Vi kan, vi bekvövs!* (Stockholm, 1983), p 11-59; Ohlander Ann-Sofie "Det osynliga barnet? Kampen om den socialdemokratiska familjepolitiken", red. Missgeld Klaus, mfl *Socialdemokratis samhälle 1889-1989* (Kristanstad 1989) p 170-190; Abukhanfusa Kerstin, *Piskan och moroten* (Stockholm, 1987), p.347sq.

L'historienne américaine Karen Offen pense que ce modèle est également prédominant en France, Offen Karen, "Women and the Politics of Motherhood in France, 1920-1940", *EUI Working Papers* nr 87/293, p 11

s'occupant d'un enfant, rendait la situation de ces femmes, seules avec des enfants à charge, très difficile.

### La situation avant 1917

Avant la loi de 1917, la situation des enfants illégitimes et de leurs parents était régie par la loi de 1734 et par le décret sur l'infanticide de 1787 (*Barnamordsplakaten*). L'enfant naturel n'avait droit qu'aux aliments de la part de ses parents. L'enfant n'héritait pas de son père. Depuis 1866, il pouvait hériter de sa mère, dans certaines conditions.<sup>4</sup> Pour établir la paternité, il suffisait de démontrer que l'homme avait eu des relations sexuelles avec la mère au moment de la conception. Que l'homme soit marié ou célibataire n'avait aucune importance. Que la mère ait eu des relations avec d'autres hommes à la même période, ne constituait pas, non plus, un obstacle à l'établissement de la paternité. Mais le tribunal pouvait donner à l'homme la possibilité de jurer qu'il ne pouvait être le père de l'enfant. L'accusé pouvait ainsi réfuter la paternité dont il était accusé. Selon l'opinion publique, cela était pratique courante.<sup>5</sup> La commission qui prépara la nouvelle loi avait commandé une enquête à l'Office de statistiques (*Kungliga Statistiska Centralbyrån*). Cette enquête s'intéressa entre autre aux procès de paternité jugés en première instance en 1910 et 1913. Elle nous apprend qu'en 1910, seulement 5% des naissances illégitimes donnaient lieu à un procès mais, dans 4/5 de ces procès, la femme obtenait rapidement gain de cause. L'effet de la procédure a donc été plutôt de dissuader les mères de porter plainte devant les tribunaux. En ville, en 1913, dans seulement 7,6% des procès la preuve était administrée par la parole juratoire de l'homme alors qu'à la campagne cette même proportion était de 26,1%. Mais dans environ la moitié de ces cas, l'homme a failli, il n'a pas osé jurer qu'il ne pouvait être le père de l'enfant.<sup>6</sup> Du début du siècle, jusqu'à la première guerre mondiale, les naissances illégitimes grimpent de 12% de l'ensemble des naissances, à près de 16%. Ce taux oscillera entre 14% et 16% jusqu'aux années trente où il retrouve son niveau

<sup>4</sup> Il y avait une catégorie d'enfants illégitimes qui était plus privilégiée, c'étaient les enfants dont les parents étaient fiancés (*trolovade*). Ces enfants avaient les mêmes droits qu'un enfant légitime. Mais il semble qu'au cas où leurs parents ne légalisaient pas leur union, leur statut était fragile. Selon Marja Taussi-Sjöberg (Taussi-Sjöberg Marja, *Skiljas* (1988), p 142sq) les droits très importants attachés aux fiançailles, ont, dans la pratique, été diminués progressivement tout au long de la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle. Ce changement dans la pratique aurait donc précédé la dégradation du statut des fiançailles dans la législation matrimoniale suédoise. Après la loi de 1917, l'enfant dont les parents étaient fiancés garde le droit de porter le nom de son père. Il n'hérite plus de la famille de son père, seulement de son père.

<sup>5</sup> Voir par ex. *Lagberedningens förslag till revision av giftermålsbalken och av vissa delar av ärvdabalken*. III Förslag till lag om barn utom äktenskapet mm (Stockholm, 1915), p 168-169; Sachs Hilda, *Män och barn* (Stockholm, 1915), p 12; Petterson Jacob, *De utom äktenskapet födda barnen och deras ställning* (Stockholm, 1911), p 19; Tiselius Ellen, "Förslag till lag om barn utom äktenskapet I", Hertha 1916:3; "De utomäktenskapliga barnens ställning", Hertha 1916:14

<sup>6</sup> *Utom äktenskapet födda barn* III, Kungliga statistiska Centralbyrån, Statistiska meddelanden, serie A, band 1:10 (Stockholm, 1917), p 13, 28, 37



d'avant-guerre. A Stockholm, cette proportion passe d'environ 1/3 à un peu plus de 1/4.<sup>7</sup>

Plusieurs historiens et ethnologues suédois se sont intéressés à la situation des mères célibataires et de leurs enfants à la fin du XIXe siècle.<sup>8</sup> Ces études nous montrent toutes les nuances de cette condition, de la misère et du mépris généralisé à l'intégration plus ou moins heureuse. L'enquête de l'Office de statistiques révèle que sur l'ensemble des femmes qui en 1889 ont donné naissance à un enfant illégitime, près de 40% se sont mariés par la suite.<sup>9</sup> Un pasteur du nom de John Vestin, présente dans un article en 1915, des résultats d'une petite enquête personnelle qu'il a menée dans sa paroisse de Gudmundrå et qui confirme ces chiffres. Il nous apprend aussi que parmi ses paroissiens, environ 20% des enfants naturels ont des parents qui vivent en concubinage.<sup>10</sup> Selon l'Office de statistiques, la plupart des enfants illégitimes avaient pour mère une ouvrière, une domestique ou, dans une certaine mesure, une fille de paysans.<sup>11</sup> Au sujet des pères, nous ne pouvons connaître que ceux qui ont plus tard épousé la mère, ceux qui étaient fiancés (*trolovade*) ou ceux qui avaient fait l'objet d'un procès. Ces renseignements laissent à penser que les pères illégitimes sont, dans la grande majorité des cas, à chercher dans les mêmes milieux que la mère.<sup>12</sup>

La responsabilité de l'enfant naturel repose sur la mère. Sa seule échappatoire est le décret de 1787 (*Barnamordsplakatet*) qui lui donne le droit d'accoucher et de déclarer l'enfant sans donner son nom. En 1889, 6% des mères célibataires ont choisi cette solution.<sup>13</sup> La responsabilité maternelle est reconnue, mais du coup aussi renforcée, en 1905, par une réforme qui donne le droit à l'enfant naturel d'hériter de sa mère et de la famille de sa mère.

Dans le débat on parle volontiers des souffrances injustes et de la mort précoce qui seraient le lot des enfants naturels. C'est ici qu'il faut chercher la raison de leurs tendances criminelles, pense-t-on. S'ils ne finissent pas voleurs,

<sup>7</sup> *Statistisk Årsbok; Sveriges Officiella Statistik*; tous les chiffres sont calculés sur la base des naissances vivantes.

<sup>8</sup> Källemark Ann-Sofie, "Att vänta barn när man gifter sig", *Historisk Tidskrift* 1977:2; Källemark Ann-Sofie, "Hotet mot familjen", *Historisk Tidskrift* 1978:1; Frykman Jonas, *Horan i bondesamballet* (Lund, 1977); Frykman Jonas, "Sexual intercourse and social norms", *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1975; Taussi-Sjöberg Marja, *Dufvans fångar* (1986) surtout p 22-40, p 150sq. Voir aussi les travaux de Birgit Persson.

<sup>9</sup> *Utom äktenskapet födda barn* II, Kungliga Statistiska Centralbyrån, Statistiska meddelanden, serie A, band 1:5 (Stockholm, 1916), p 33sq

<sup>10</sup> Vestin John, "De utom äktenskapet födda barnen", *Social Tidskrift* 1915:2

<sup>11</sup> *Utom äktenskapet födda barn* I, Kungliga Statistiska Centralbyrån, Statistiska meddelanden, serie A, band 1:4 (Stockholm, 1914) I, p 51sq; voir aussi Vestin John, "De utom äktenskapet födda barnen", *Social Tidskrift* 1915:2

<sup>12</sup> *Utom äktenskapet födda barn* II, op.cit. p 39sq, p 101-102; *Utom äktenskapet födda barn* III, op.cit. p 9-10, p 24-25; voir aussi *Utom äktenskapet födda barn* I, op.cit. p 52-53

<sup>13</sup> *Utom äktenskapet födda barn* II, op.cit. p 85 sq

ils seront prostitués ou vagabonds.<sup>14</sup> Mais on voit également l'enfant illégitime comme un danger politique, un anarchiste, un antisocial en puissance.<sup>15</sup> On entend aussi dire que les enfants naturels coûtent trop cher à l'Assistance aux pauvres (*Fattigvården*).<sup>16</sup> La condition de la mère est plus rarement abordée. Certains débatteurs soulignent cependant la difficile situation devant laquelle elle se trouve quand elle doit travailler et élever son enfant en même temps.<sup>17</sup> Plusieurs groupes de la société suédoise de l'époque s'intéressent aux enfants illégitimes et à leurs parents: féministes, militants philanthropiques et pasteurs de l'Eglise luthérienne d'Etat. Ces derniers ont exigé avec force, pendant tout le XIXe siècle, que le droit à l'anonymat de la mère soit aboli. Petit à petit, ils commencent à s'intéresser aux pères aussi.<sup>18</sup> Un des leurs propose, par exemple, la prison pour les pères qui ne payent pas les pensions auxquelles ils ont été astreints.<sup>19</sup> Ces trois groupes sont l'élément moteur d'une pétition en 1910/1911 qui amène le gouvernement à se saisir de la question des enfants illégitimes et des mères célibataires, ce qui donnera la loi de 1917. Le sens de la pétition est résumé dans les mots suivants:..."des mesures urgentes sont nécessaires pour améliorer la condition juridique des enfants et des mères face aux pères".<sup>20</sup>

### La nouvelle loi

La loi de 1917 renforce le contrôle social exercé sur les familles "désordonnées".<sup>21</sup> Sont instaurés à cet effet, les curateurs (*barnavårdsmän*). Leur rôle est de faire établir la paternité, avec ou sans l'aide de la mère, et de

<sup>14</sup> *Riksdagens Protokoll*, AK 1917:48, Sjöberg p 41; *Riksdagens Protokoll*, FK 1917:35, Petrén p 29, Hellberg p 43; 1917:36, Petrén p 11

<sup>15</sup> Pettersson J., op.cit. p 2, p 40; *Utom äktenskapet födda barn* II, op.cit., p 66sq

<sup>16</sup> *Riksdagens Protokoll*, FK 1917:35, Hellberg p 43; *Konseljakten* 20 jan 1917, Justitiedep., proposition 61, 2 vol., Riksarkivet, Stockholm: "Petition ang. lagstiftning för tillgodoseende av utom äktenskapet födda barns och deras mödrars rättsliga ställning, m.m."

<sup>17</sup> *Riksdagens Protokoll*, FK 1917:35, Petrén p 30; Tiseliuss Ellen, "Förslag till lag om barn utom äktenskapet I", Hertha 1916:3

<sup>18</sup> *Konseljakten*: "Skrivelse från Kyrkorådet 8 oktober 1898 till Konungen"; "Utlåtande från Justitiekanslerämbetet angående skrivelse från Kyrkorådet av den 8 oktober 1898", avgivet den 27 december 1900; "Skrivelse från Kyrkomötet till Konungen 6 oktober 1903 angående moment 7 circular 1778 om barnamord upphävande"; "Skrivelse från Kyrkomötet till Konungen angående moment 7 i circular 1778 mot barnamord avskaffande 20 oktober 1908"; "Skrivelse från Svenska Prästföreningen till Konungen inkom till Justitiedep. 28 oktober 1913" Les deux propositions parlementaires de 1906 qui demandent l'abolition de l'anonymat de la mère sont l'oeuvre de pasteurs, *Motioner i AK* 1906:129 et 1906:72

<sup>19</sup> Isberg H., "Lagberedningens förslag till lag om barn utom äktenskapet", *Social Tidskrift* 1916:2

<sup>20</sup> *Konseljakten*; Pettersson J., op.cit. p 2; "Kvinnliga Diskussionsklubben i Stockholm", Dagny 1910:41; "De övergivna mödrarna", Dagny 1910:42

<sup>21</sup> Svensk författningssamling 1917:796



s'assurer qu'une pension est fixée et versée par la suite. Tout accord entre le père et la mère sur la pension doit recevoir l'aval du curateur, et dans certains cas, du Conseil municipal de l'enfance (*Barnavårdsnämnden*). Le curateur doit surveiller la façon dont la mère emploie l'argent. Il ou elle doit aussi encourager la mère à allaiter.<sup>22</sup> La mère n'a plus le droit de rester anonyme. La commission qui a préparé la nouvelle législation, se dit consciente d'avoir sacrifié le droit de la femme à celui de l'enfant. Mais on a estimé que ce dernier était supérieur.<sup>23</sup> Du côté des organisations féministes, on a fait remarquer les difficultés que cela allait créer. Le Comité directeur des femmes sociaux-démocrates (*Socialdemokratiska kvinnornas centralstyrelse*) et le Comité directeur de l'Association nationale pour le suffrage politique des femmes (*Centralstyrelsen för Landsföreningen för kvinnans politiska rösträtt*), la plus grande organisation suffragiste suédoise réunissant des femmes de toutes tendances politiques, font savoir au gouvernement qu'ils désirent que la femme soit quand même protégée de façon qu'elle puisse cacher sa maternité au cas où elle risquerait d'avoir des problèmes pour gagner sa vie, si sa maternité était connue.<sup>24</sup> L'Hospice général des enfants à Stockholm (*Allmänna Barnhuset i Stockholm*), la seule institution suédoise à recueillir des enfants sous couvert d'anonymat, se retourne contre cette réforme qui menacerait son activité. Mais son médecin en chef approuve la nouvelle disposition car il pense que c'est une mauvaise chose de séparer l'enfant de sa mère:

*"Tous les efforts et toute l'activité de l'Hospice des enfants n'ont pu sauver aucun enfant. En séparant l'enfant et la mère, il a en plus été funeste d'un point de vue éthique et social."*<sup>25</sup>

La mère a la garde de l'enfant selon la nouvelle loi, à moins que les autorités ne la jugent indigne. Elle peut demander que le père l'aide pour les frais d'accouchement et l'entretien en partie pendant six semaines précédant l'accouchement et six semaines après celui-ci. Les deux parents doivent maintenant plus que les aliments à l'enfant. Ils doivent l'entretenir et l'éduquer en fonction de leur moyens jusqu'à l'âge de 15 ans. Il s'agit avant tout, écrit la commission préparatoire, de dégager la société d'une dépense qui incombe aux pères.<sup>26</sup> La possibilité d'innocenter un homme sur sa parole au cours d'un procès de paternité, est réduite. La fidélité de la femme à un seul homme, au moment de la conception, n'est toujours pas exigée pour établir la paternité. C'est toujours un père possible qu'on cherche, non pas le père réel. On ne peut cependant pas faire condamner plusieurs hommes à être le père d'un même enfant. Au cas où un premier procès échoue, on peut intenter procès à un autre homme. L'enfant porte le nom de sa mère. Il n'hérite pas de son père.

<sup>22</sup> Carlsson Victor, Löfving Birger, *Lagstiftningen om barn utom äktenskapet mm* (Stockholm, 1938), p 75

<sup>23</sup> *Lagberedningens förslag*, etc..., op.cit. p 180-185; voir aussi *Utom äktenskapet födda barn* II, op.cit. p 84sq

<sup>24</sup> *Konselfakten*: Remiss från Centralstyrelsen för Landsföreningen för kvinnans politiska rösträtt; remiss från Socialdemokratiska Kvinnornas Centralstyrelse. Voir aussi Sachs H., op.cit. p 7

<sup>25</sup> *Konselfakten*: Remiss från Stockholms Allmänna Barnhus 29 mars 1916

<sup>26</sup> *Lagberedningens förslag*, etc... a.a.; p 101

On considère d'habitude en Suède que la nouvelle loi a été d'une grande importance pour améliorer le sort des enfants naturels et des mères célibataires. Les pères auraient été plus souvent obligés de payer une pension. La loi permettait de saisir la pension directement sur le salaire. Nombreux étaient ceux qui avaient espéré que l'Etat prendrait en charge les pensions non versées. L'Association nationale pour le suffrage politique des femmes (*Landsföreningen för kvinnans politiska rösträtt*), par exemple, était de cet avis. Cette association estime que cela serait le premier pas vers une nécessaire allocation aux mères célibataires.<sup>27</sup> La plus populaire des deux chambres du parlement suédois, a aussi émis un vœu dans ce sens.<sup>28</sup> La discussion à ce sujet avait déjà commencé avant le vote de la nouvelle loi. En 1912, une commission chargée d'étudier les retraites des personnes âgées était arrivée à la conclusion qu'une allocation aux veuves et aux mères célibataires était justifiée quoique trop chère. Le chef de file des sociaux-démocrates, Hjalmar Branting, plus tard premier ministre, avait fait partie de cette commission. Il s'était prononcé en faveur de l'instauration d'une telle allocation en ces termes:

*"Une veuve ou une mère célibataire (ainsi qu'un veuf) est d'une certaine manière, même si elle est capable de travailler, invalide dans le sens qu'une partie de sa force de travail est accaparée par l'éducation et l'entretien des enfants."*<sup>29</sup>

Une autre commission, chargée d'étudier l'assistance aux pauvres, revient, dans les années vingt, sur cette question. Elle constate combien c'est difficile pour une mère seule de gagner assez pour elle et son enfant, ainsi la politique de l'enfance doit avoir pour but de *"rendre les mères capables d'accomplir leur devoir en ce qui concerne le soin de leurs enfants"*. Il faut pour ce faire, d'abord se retourner vers le père pour exiger qu'il paye sa part mais quand cela ne donne rien il faut que la société aide la mère. Puisque les mères célibataires sont déjà en contact avec le Conseil municipal de l'enfance (*Barnavårdsnämnden*), par l'intermédiaire du curateur, il ne sera pas difficile de surveiller leurs foyers et contrôler l'emploi qu'elles feraient de l'allocation. Cette allocation devrait être accordée sous condition que la mère s'occupe de son enfant d'une façon jugée satisfaisante.<sup>30</sup> Cette allocation aboutira à la fin des années trente, mais prendra alors la forme d'une avance des pensions non versées.

Après 1917, la plupart des pères ont reconnu leurs enfants illégitimes. On estime qu'au milieu des années trente, seulement 9% des enfants illégitimes en ville, et 13% à la campagne, étaient de père inconnu.<sup>31</sup> Mais pour payer la

<sup>27</sup> *Konseljakten*: Remiss från Centralstyrelsen för Landsföreningen för kvinnans politiska rösträtt

<sup>28</sup> *Riksdagens Protokoll*, AK 1917:49

<sup>29</sup> *Ålderdomsförsäkringskommittén, Betänkande och förslag angående allmän pensionsförsäkring* (Stockholm, 1912), p 52-54, p 131-132

<sup>30</sup> *Förslag till lag om den offentliga barnavården*, Fattigvårdslagstiftningskommitténs betänkanden (Stockholm, 1921), p 46sq, citation p 47, 48

<sup>31</sup> *Statens offentliga utredning* 1936:47, p 30



pension, les pères se faisaient tirer l'oreille: en 1935, la moitié des enfants pour lesquels un montant de pension avait été fixé et qui étaient suivis par un curateur, ne recevaient pas d'argent.<sup>32</sup> En 1937 est donc établi le principe d'une allocation-avance sur pension. Le père fautif devra reverser plus tard aux autorités les sommes avancées. Cette allocation-avance est réservée aux enfants reconnus et bénéficiaires théoriques d'une pension. Si la mère a des revenus supérieur à un certain seuil, l'avance n'aura pas lieu.<sup>33</sup>

### La logique du système

La mère célibataire est l'objet de tous les soupçons. Ses aptitudes maternelles sont mises en doute.<sup>34</sup> L'avance sur pension n'est pas donnée aux mères d'enfants dont on n'a pas pu établir la paternité, la commission qui a préparé la réforme l'explique de la façon suivante:

*"Une allocation fixe qui serait assurée à la mère célibataire dès que ses revenus passent au dessous d'un certain seuil, ne peut être recommandée car l'intérêt qu'aura la mère de faire établir la paternité diminuera. Cela aura pour conséquence que la mère refusera probablement dans de nombreux cas de donner des renseignements au sujet du père."*<sup>35</sup>

L'Office de statistiques avait commencé la présentation de son enquête avec le jugement suivant sur les mères célibataires:

*"les mères, qui souvent manquent de capacités pour accomplir le devoir maternel, ne sont pas capables de porter seules la responsabilité morale et économique qu'implique l'éducation d'un enfant"*<sup>36</sup>

Le curateur fait partie d'un dispositif de surveillance de ces mères suspectes. Le curateur pouvait être fonctionnaire municipal ou bénévole. Il pouvait être homme ou femme (dans les villes c'étaient souvent des femmes fonctionnaires, employées à cet effet). Mais malgré les directives de la loi, tous les enfants n'avaient pas de curateur. En 1935, environ 94 500 enfants illégitimes avaient un curateur, contre 52 000 qui n'en avaient pas. Parmi ces derniers il y a ceux dont les parents vivent ensemble.<sup>37</sup> Les responsables municipaux sont accusés de manquer de zèle.<sup>38</sup> On espère que l'absence d'allocation pour les enfants dont on n'a pas établi la filiation, incitera les municipalités à s'occuper plus de la question. En punissant ainsi économiquement les mères célibataires, on crée un moyen de chantage pour faire fonctionner le système de la loi de 1917.

<sup>32</sup>ibid., p 40

<sup>33</sup>Svensk författningssamling 1937:383

<sup>34</sup>Lagberedningens förslag, etc..., op.cit. p 133 sq, *Utom äktenskapet födda barn* I, op.cit. p 3; voir aussi *Förslag till lag om den offentliga barnavården*, op.cit. p 46sq

<sup>35</sup>*Statens offentliga utredningar* 1936:47, p 31

<sup>36</sup>*Utom äktenskapet födda barn* I, Kungliga Statistiska Centralbyrån, Statistiska meddelanden, serie A, band 1:4 (Stockholm, 1914), p 3

<sup>37</sup>*Statens offentliga utredningar* 1936:47, p 66-68

<sup>38</sup>ibid., p 42, 68-69

La surveillance que le curateur doit exercer sur la façon dont la mère emploie la pension, est aussi un signe de cette suspicion. Il est recommandé que la pension soit versée par mensualités afin que la femme ne la dépense pas sans considération pour l'enfant.<sup>39</sup> Une suspicion plus générale envers les capacités féminines se fait jour dans les réactions négatives à la proposition que les femmes puissent être curateurs dans le cadre de la nouvelle loi.<sup>40</sup>

Mais d'une façon globale, la proposition de la nouvelle loi est très favorablement accueillie quand elle est présentée en 1915. La critique vient essentiellement de ceux qui pensent que la proposition ne va pas assez loin en ne proposant pas l'avance sur la pension et le droit d'héritage après le père.<sup>41</sup> C'est autour de cette dernière question que se cristallisera la plus grande partie du débat, au parlement et ailleurs.

Le débat parlementaire, pourtant si calme et unanime au sujet de la nouvelle loi, prend une tournure plus passionnée quand on commence à parler du droit d'hériter. Ceux qui sont contre, pensent que la façon dont on établit la paternité en Suède ne donne pas toute l'assurance que le père légal soit également le père biologique. Si on veut vraiment établir la paternité, il faudra commencer par exiger que la femme ait été d'une fidélité irréprochable au moment de la conception. Cela aura pour conséquence que beaucoup d'enfants se retrouveront sans père.<sup>42</sup> Si l'enfant naturel pouvait hériter, cela équivaldrait à favoriser le concubinage et rabaisser le mariage, ajoutent certains.<sup>43</sup> Ceux qui sont pour le droit d'héritage des enfants naturels y voient un avantage moral. Les hommes réfléchiront avant de faire des enfants à droite et à gauche.<sup>44</sup> Cela améliorera la conduite des maris qui seront obligés d'être francs avec leurs épouses, ne pouvant plus cacher aussi facilement leurs fautes.<sup>45</sup> Les partisans de

<sup>39</sup> *Lagberedningens förslag*, etc..., op.cit. p 110sq

<sup>40</sup> *Konseljakten*: Voir par ex Remisser från Uppsala, Hallands, och Gotlands landskansli.

<sup>41</sup> *Konseljakten*: Remiss från Centralstyrelsen för Landsföreningen för kvinnans politiska rösträtt; remiss från Socialdemokratiska Kvinnornas Centralstyrelse; remiss från Barnavårdsbyrån i Stockholm; Utdrag av protokollet, hållet vid sammanträde med styrelsen för Stockholms stads rättshjälpskontor; Tiseliuss Ellen, "Förslag till lag om barn utom äktenskapet II", Hertha 1916:4

<sup>42</sup> *Riksdagens Protokoll*, FK 1917:35: Gezelius p 36-43, Alexandersson p 60-66; *Riksdagens Protokoll*, AK 1917:48 Statsrådet Stenberg p 16-21, Petersson i Lidingö villastad p 32-37. Voir aussi: *Lagberedningens förslag*, etc..., op.cit. p 125sq; Isberg H., "Lagberedningens förslag till lag om barn utom äktenskapet", Social Tidskrift 1916:2

<sup>43</sup> *Riksdagens Protokoll*, FK 1917:35: Gezelius p 36-43, Rogberg p 52-59, von Mentzer p 70-71; *Riksdagens Protokoll*, AK 1917:48 Statsrådet Stenberg p 16-21, Petersson i Lidingö villastad p 32-37, Petersson i Bjälbo p 43

<sup>44</sup> *Riksdagens Protokoll*, FK 1917:35, Petrén p 31-35, Hellberg p 45-52, von Koch p 55-59, Stadener p 68-69; *Riksdagens Protokoll*, AK 1917:48: Petersson i Södertälje p 26-29. Voir aussi: "Lagstiftningen om barn utom äktenskapet", Social Tidskrift 1916:6; "Om arvsrätt efter fader för de utom äktenskapet födda barnen", Social Tidskrift 1917:3; "Förslag till lag om barn utom äktenskapet", Hertha 1917:5; Sachs H., op.cit.; Tiseliuss Ellen, "Förslag till lag om barn utom äktenskapet I", Hertha 1916:3

<sup>45</sup> *Riksdagens Protokoll*, FK 1917:35, Petrén p 31-35, von Koch p 55-59



l'héritage peuvent envisager deux sortes de paternité illégitime: une paternité minimale là où l'on n'est pas sûr, à cause de l'inconduite de la mère, que l'homme soit le vrai père et une où il est hors de doute que l'homme est le père. La première paternité impliquera juste le paiement de la pension, la deuxième entraînera le droit pour l'enfant d'hériter. L'héritage aurait l'avantage psychologique de rendre plus égaux enfants légitimes et enfants illégitimes, disent-ils, quitte à laisser quelques enfants sans véritable père.<sup>46</sup> C'est donc la conduite morale de la mère qui conditionnera le droit de l'enfant.

Les femmes sociaux-démocrates avaient fait remarquer qu'à leur avis, le droit de la femme n'était pas assez garanti par la loi. Elles voulaient que son droit de garde sur l'enfant soit assuré.<sup>47</sup> Certains juristes partagent cette opinion et pensent que le droit du père était disproportionné par rapport à celui de la mère et que la mère célibataire était dans ce cas bien moins dotée que la mère légitime.<sup>48</sup>

Le nouveau système de l'enfance illégitime peut être interprété comme une volonté de contrôler et d'éduquer l'illégitimité que l'on considère comme un problème social en soi. En 1916, on pouvait lire l'analyse suivante dans un des journaux féministes:

*"La paternité et la maternité hors mariage doivent être considérées comme des anomalies de la vie sociale et ce n'est pas dans l'intérêt de la société de reconnaître une telle condition plus que ne l'exige la surveillance du droit de l'enfant par rapport aux parents."*<sup>49</sup>

Une quinzaine d'années après le vote de la loi, les questions familiales et natalistes passionneront le débat public en Suède. La volonté d'éducation sociale se manifestera alors de nouveau en ce domaine. Une commission d'experts nommée par le gouvernement afin d'étudier les *"aspects socio-éthiques du problème de la population"* recommande par exemple, d'éduquer les Suédois pour leur faire comprendre la supériorité du mariage sur l'illégitimité. Le mariage serait la solution au problème des mères célibataires:

*"c'est du plus haut intérêt que la plus grande partie possible de la population vive dans des relations monogames sous forme de mariages et que les relations hors mariage se légalisent. Ceci est très important à la fois pour l'individu, puisque l'état matrimonial l'aide à poursuivre une relation stable, et pour la société qui a intérêt à assurer un ordre objectif. Cet intérêt apparaît fortement en ce qui concerne les enfants. En légalisant, on fixe les devoirs du père envers l'enfant d'une toute autre manière. Le père naturel a, cela est vrai, l'obligation de subvenir aux besoins de l'enfant et ceci est un devoir qu'on doit exiger de lui, mais l'avenir de l'enfant n'est cependant pas*

<sup>46</sup>*Riksdagens Protokoll*, FK 1917:35, Petrén p 31-35, von Koch p 55-59; *Riksdagens Protokoll*, AK 1917:48; Pettersson i Södertälje p 26-29 och p 57, Persson i Norrköping p 48-53. Voir aussi: Pettersson J., op.cit. p 34-35; "Om arvsrätt efter fader för de utom äktenskapet födda barnen", *Social Tidskrift* 1917:3.

<sup>47</sup>*Konseljakten*: Remiss från Socialdemokratiska Kvinnornas Centralstyrelse

<sup>48</sup>*Konseljakten*: "Utdrag av protokollet, hållet vid sammanträde med styrelsen för Stockholms stads rättshjälpskontor den 16 maj 1916"

<sup>49</sup>Tiseliuss Ellen, "Förslag till lag om barn utom äktenskapet II", *Hertha* 1916:4, p 72-79

*garanti de la même façon dans la relation illégitime que dans la relation légitime et de ce fait, la place de la femme est évidemment plus difficile.*<sup>50</sup>

Peu nombreux sont ceux et celles qui replacent la condition des mères célibataires dans un contexte socio-économique plus large que la relation entre le père et la mère. La social-démocrate Anna Lindhagen fait exception: dans un article en 1910, elle propose en outre le renforcement des obligations paternelles, des salaires plus élevés pour les femmes, des logements moins chers, des crèches, des allocations d'accouchement et des maisons d'accueil pour mères et nourrissons, pour résoudre les problèmes des mères célibataires. Elle est par ailleurs la seule à faire le lien entre la législation du travail suédoise qui interdit le travail industriel à une femme pendant six semaines après l'accouchement, sans indemnité, et la nécessité d'une allocation pour les mères célibataires.<sup>51</sup> D'autres féministes tendent aussi à dire qu'il ne suffit pas de faire prendre leurs responsabilités aux hommes pour résoudre le problème des mères célibataires.<sup>52</sup>

En résumé, nous pouvons donc dire que le débat suédois autour de la nouvelle loi de 1917 est un débat qui se mènent dans les termes du "social", des formes de vie qu'il convient d'apprendre aux marginaux et aux pauvres. Les pères présumés des enfants illégitimes seront contraints à payer une pension et les mères seront surveillées et aidées par un curateur. Chaque cas d'illégitimité devra, en théorie, être suivi par un curateur. Il s'agit donc de faire prendre leurs responsabilités aux hommes et aux femmes. Mais ces responsabilités ne sont pas les mêmes selon les sexes. Les débatteurs et les législateurs, ne peuvent que très rarement concevoir la mère célibataire autrement que comme un être dépendant. Dépendant d'un homme ou des autorités ou des deux. La mère célibataire est en plus soupçonnée de ne pas être une bonne mère.

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<sup>50</sup> *Statens offentliga utredningar* 1938:19, p 43

<sup>51</sup> Lindhagen Anna, "Fattiga ensammodrar och deras barn", Dagny 1910:39; Konseljaktens: "Utdrag av protokollet, hållet vid sammanträde med styrelsen för Stockholms stads rättshjälpskontor den 16 maj 1916"

<sup>52</sup> Dagny 1910:38, "Vårt rättssamhälle", sign. A.K.; Rogberg Ina, "Hvad skola vi göra?", Dagny 1910:41; Sachs Hilda, op.cit. ; Persson Birgit, "Frida Stéenhoff-bekämpare av patriarkatet", *Arbetshistoria* 1987:4/1988:1

Christina Carlsson (Carlsson C., op.cit., p 266sq) et Ann-Sofie Ohlander (Ohlander A-S., op.cit., p 170-190) ont montré comment les femmes sociaux-démocrates, dans les premières années du siècle, ont pris position pour la mère célibataire en exigeant que le père prenne ses responsabilités et verse une pension. Elles ont aussi demandé des maisons pour mères et nourrissons et une allocation-avance des pensions. Carlsson voit dans ces revendications, la volonté de rendre la paternité possible hors mariage.



## **Part II**

### **Single Mothers and Poor Relief in a Swedish Industrial Town (Gävle) at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century**

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SINGLE MOTHERS AND POOR RELIEF IN A SWEDISH INDUSTRIAL TOWN (GÄVLE)  
THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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## INTRODUCTION

For the Swedish research project "Women, Motherhood and Social Policy" I am examining how the most exposed mothers were treated by society and in what way they were viewed at the beginning of the century, and how democratisation, women's entry into political assemblies and the increasing activity in social reform changed this. By the most exposed mothers I mean single women with children to provide for, ie unmarried mothers, widows and divorcees. In the larger towns especially, single mothers constituted a large part of the population. They often had difficulties in providing for themselves and were then dependent upon assistance to keep their families together. The many unmarried mothers and illegitimate children constituted an important social problem and the consequences for mother and child were often distress, separation and social stigma. The mothers were often forced to leave their children in inadequate foster-homes, and the mortality rate for illegitimate children was much higher than for other children. The burden of illegitimate births was placed almost totally upon the mothers. Men could deny paternity by taking the oath.

From the end of the 1910's and in the next two decades, the first really serious attempts were made towards a Welfare State. A large part of this concerned motherhood, child welfare and the so-called population policy. Social questions were also seen as a natural area of interest for women and women's organisations, and the few women politicians that existed, were mostly engaged in social matters. If this "pioneering generation" was able to exercise political influence, then it was most probably in this area.

An investigation of this kind cannot be carried out on a national level, but it is feasible on a local level. Data on the place of study and the groups of people in the study however, are compared to other accessible data on a national level and from other towns. I think that it is important to relate the socio-political legislation and the debate on a national level to the facts on social policy as it really happened to mothers in need of assistance, because such a large part of Swedish social policy was (and is) the concern of local government, even if it was regulated by a frame-work of government legislation.

This essay will mainly discuss the situation in and around 1910. It will deal mostly with the unmarried mothers, whilst the widows and divorcees shall function as comparative groups. It is mainly based on my papers that I refer to in the list of literature at the end of the essay.

## THE PLACE OF INVESTIGATION

I have chosen the town of Gävle for many reasons. In 1910 it was the fifth largest town with approx. 35,000 inhabitants, ie not large enough for the groups in my study to become too unwieldy, and neither was it, in Swedish terms, an insignificant small town. As in almost all Swedish towns at this time, women constituted the greater part of inhabitants, and most of the adult women were unmarried or widows. Gävle was an industrial centre, a port and trade town, employing many women in branches like textiles, tailoring, tobacco and porcelain, and even more women were employed as maids, housekeepers, laundresses, cleaners and seamstresses, and other similar jobs. At the first local government election in 1919 with universal and equal suffrage, women constituted 58% of those entitled to vote. In this election the Social-Democrats seized the political power in the town, which they have held onto ever since.

UNMARRIED WOMEN, DIVORCEES AND WIDOWS WITH UNDER AGE CHILDREN IN GÄVLE  
IN 1910 - SOME STATISTICS

I have gone through extracts from the parish records for the 1910 census. From these I have made excerpts of the information about all the families of unmarried and divorced mothers and widows with under-age children, living at the same address as the mother. These families constitute the groups in my study.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, in Sweden, the percentage of all the newborn rose amongst illegitimate children to over 10% and the percentage then culminated in the decades 1910-1940 at about 15%, and then decreased again.<sup>1</sup> The illegitimate birth rate in Gävle in the 1890's was 13.8%, 1901-1910 17.7% and in both the 1910's and 1920's 22.7% of all those born. During the latter decade only Stockholm and Uppsala had a higher percentage (of the large towns) than Gävle. In the middle of the 1930's these figures falls to approx. 15%. During the first 35 years of this century nearly 5,000 illegitimate children were born in a town with about 35,000 inhabitants. This means that between 1901 and 1910, 1,500 illeg. children were born in a population where the average number of unmarried and previously married women, aged between 20-45, was a little more than 3,000. As almost all of the unmarried women belonged to the working class, it can be calculated that almost 40% of the working class children in the town during the first decades of the century were born illegitimate.<sup>2</sup>

According to a survey published in 1916 by the Swedish Central Statistical Office (SCB) on the illeg. children born in 1889, including betrothal children, at the coming of age of the child, in towns outside Stockholm, about one third of their mothers had married, of which more than half with the child's father, so called legitimation. This does not however mean that all these children were integrated in these newly formed families. Many of these marriages were also entered into several years after the birth of the illeg. children.

Of the remaining mothers, who did not marry, many left their children in care. Just how many is uncertain, because a high percentage of the towns not legitimated children have not been possible to trace for the investigators. However, it can be estimated that the greater part of the decrease is due to the boarding out of children. In total this should mean that at least about one half of all the illeg. new-born in 1889 in course of time were left in care. The survey also shows that was usual for the mother to keep her child during the youngest years and then to board it out, but also that immediately after birth a large proportion of the illeg. children were moved to foster-parents in the countryside. Also later many illeg. children left the towns for the countryside, whilst the figures are considerably less for illeg. children moving to the towns before confirmation.<sup>3</sup>

In Gävle in 1910, there were about 350 unmarried mothers who took care of their approx. 425 under-age, illeg. children. There were probably a few scores to add to this figure, who lived in Gävle but had not had time, or wish, to be registered in the town, which corresponds to those

1 Historisk Statistik, volume 1, table 38

2 Befolkningsrörelsen i Sverige 1891-1900 table 5, SOS

Befolkningsrörelsen 1901-1910 table 5, SOS Befolkningsrörelsen 1911-

1920 table 4, SOS Befolkningsrörelsen 1921-1930 table 4, SOS

Befolkningsrörelsen 1931-1937 table 4, SOS Befolkningsrörelsen 1938-1940 table 3. SOS Folkräkningen 1910 part II table 5, SOS Folkräkningen 1920 part III table 4, SOS Folkräkningen 1930 part II table 8

3 Utom äktenskapet födda barn part II page 12ff, 28ff, 54f and 78



in the parish records who were noted such as "not present" or "unknown address" and most likely had left Gävle. Moreover there was a group of 34 unmarried mothers, generally housekeepers, under the entry of "banns of marriage accorded". In the town in 1910, there were also 220 widows and 16 divorcees, with in total about 470 under-age children in their care. Of those formerly married, approx. 45 had had illeg. children born after marriage. According to the parish register, 87 married women were alone with their under-age children. 17 of these had illeg. children born after their marriage, and with fathers other than their husbands. There were approx. 250 foster-children and about 40 adopted children in the town.<sup>4</sup>

If one bears in mind that approx. 2,000 illeg. children were born in Gävle in a 15 year period before 1910, then the number of children living with unmarried mothers is low. Many unmarried mothers have certainly entered into marriage later, and it is also possible that migration out in this category of women was greater than the migration to the town. Moreover, some of the children died, but it is most likely that the majority of the more than 1,500 "missing" children were left to another guardian in or outside the town.

#### TYPES OF HOUSEHOLD

To what extent mothers lived only with their children or together with other adult persons has great bearing on the evaluation of how exposed their positions plausibly were. Table one shows the breakdown of the different types of households.

Table 1

Unmarried and formerly married women with under-age children in Gävle 1910 divided into different types of households. Percentage

	single with only under-age children	single with also adult children	with relatives	with adult man	in poor relief institution	
unmarried	58.2	3.1	33.6	2.2	2.8	=100 n=318
widows	42.7	56.4	0	0	0.9	=100 n=220
divorcees	68.8	31.2	0	0	0	=100 n=16

Sources: Utdrag ur församlingsbok (excerpts from the parish book for the census), Gävleborgs län 1910 nr 55 and 56.

The widows and the divorcees often lived together with also adult children. The unmarried mothers seldom did this. The reason is that they seldom had more than one child. Quite a few unmarried women actually lived with adult illeg. children, but they generally then had no under-age children, and they are therefore not included in the groups of study. Many of the unmarried mothers lived with their parents. Probably more of the unmarried than the table shows lived with men, without it appearing in the population registration. 2.2% seems to be a suspiciously low figure.

When the mothers had adult children in their homes often these provided for the family while the mothers stayed at home. The average age was, due to natural reasons, considerably higher amongst the previously married and their children. These mothers were mostly over 35 years

<sup>4</sup> Utdrag ur församlingsbok för Gävleborgs län 1910 nr 55 and 56

old, and the children were often in the age range 10-14. The unmarried mothers were mostly under 35, and they usually had their children before 25. The women who lived at home with their parents were especially young.

#### BREAKDOWN OF OCCUPATION

The occupations of the mothers according to the parish records appear in table 2.

Table 2

Professions amongst unmarried and formerly married mothers with under-age children in Gävle 1910. Percentage. The table includes those who had a profession according to the parish records.

	unmarried	formerly married
housekeepers	17.4	16.7
housemaids and servants	16.2	0
industrial workers	28.5	7.1
other subordinate service work*	32.3	45.2
lower middle class work**	3.4	11.9
higher middle class work	0	0
tradeswomen***	2.1	19.0
	-----	-----
	100	100
	n=235	n=42

\*)waitresses, laundresses, cleaners, seamstresses, chambermaids etc.  
 \*\*)clerks, cashiers, shop-assistants etc. \*\*\*)market-dealers, shopkeepers, café-keepers etc.

Sources: Utdrag ur församlingsbok (excerpts from the parish books for the census), Gävleborgs län nr 55 and 56.

The afore mentioned study by the Swedish Central Statistical Office shows the same patterns as the table, concerning the breakdown of the mother's occupations in the towns.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that the illeg. motherhood in Gävle was almost exclusively a working class phenomenon. The group in table 2 which is not designated an occupation consists mainly of mothers who lived at home with their parents. Those who have an designated occupation in these families also almost always belong to the working class. Many of the unmarried mothers who lived with their parents had a job, however, and they were often the only ones who brought in an income, on which an aged mother or father also had to live.

A large proportion of the widows have no occupation designation. I have therefore been forced to classify them according to their previous husbands occupation. 2/3 were the widows of workers. In some cases, information about the previous husband's occupation cannot be found. About 1/4 of the unmarried mothers had no profession according to the parish records. Almost all the divorcees' former husbands were workers.

<sup>5</sup> Utom äktenskapet födda barn part I page 50ff



## CHILDREN OF THE UNMARRIED MOTHERS - AGE AND PLACE OF BIRTH

Table 3

Under-age children living with their unmarried mothers i Gävle 1910, divided into classes of age and types of household. Percentage.

	0-4	5-9	10-14
with relatives(mostly parents)	78.1	19.5	2.3 =100 n=128
with other adult man	30.0	26.7	40.0 =100 n= 15
only mother and child (children)	55.2	26.8	18.0 =100 n=261
mother and child in poor relief institution	69.2	30.8	0 =100 n= 13
totally	61.9	24.7	13.4 =100 n=417*

\*5 observations are missing.

Sources: Utdrag ur församlingsbok (excerpts from the parish books for the census), Gävleborgs län nr 55 and 56.

The dominance of small children is very noticeable in the group who lived with the mother's relations, whilst the groups "with an adult man" and "only mother and child" have a more equal age distribution of the children. It seems that usually living with the mother's relatives was a temporary solution. The child was then often left to foster-parents or the mother moved away leaving the child with her parents. A large number of children left with the mother's parents have been traced in the records. Some mothers also probably married, after having first lived with their children for a while at their parents' home. If it had been a usual solution that the mother moved away from her parents with the child, when it had grown up, then the percentage of single mothers with elder children should have been greater.

77.7% of the children of the unmarried mothers were born in Gävle, 9.4% in the neighbouring municipalities and 12.9% in other places. With regard to the mothers, 62% of those living with relatives were born in Gävle or one of the neighbouring municipalities, whilst of the remaining mothers, the whole 68% were born in other places. Gävle was expanding at the end of the nineteenth century and had many people moving in.

## SOCIETY'S VIEW OF UNMARRIED MOTHERS AND ILLEG. CHILDREN

Society's view in the 1910's of the high illeg. birth rate can be seen from the quotation below. It is taken from the above mentioned SCB study and does not show any extreme point of view for the time. The study is interested in charting out anomalies and various suggestions for reforms are discussed. The investigation constitutes the trial work to the new law of 1917 on the position of illeg. children, which meant an obvious improvement. The following was said about illeg. children: "That illeg. births from a social point of view are to be seen as a particularly unfavourable phenomenon, is hardly an isolated opinion. Parents of illeg. children belong to a large extent to the poorer classes, the father's contribution to the child's welfare, when such occurs, is often insufficient, and the mothers who often are incapable of fulfilling the duties of motherhood, are in no position to alone bear the moral and economic responsibility, which the

bringing up of a child entails. Society often has to step in with a helping hand, but society is not able to compensate for, even with the greatest of economic sacrifices, the lack of either a mother's care or the protection which a husband in a family home can give both mother and child. Society runs the risk with these children, through unsuitable diet, poverty, deficient upbringing and bad example, of bringing about a physically and morally inferior element. It is society's regeneration from the bottom, which becomes more dangerous as it grows rapidly in proportion to the normal regeneration of births in wedlock."

The view of the implication for women and men, respectively, of being illeg. parents is also worth quoting:

"Owing to this statute (my notation: the proclamation of infanticide, which up until 1917 made it possible for mothers, who could afford it, to have their children in secret and for a fee, to leave them at a children's home) many women can, for whom the publicity of motherhood would bring about the most difficult of consequences, perhaps even synonymous with a squandered life, remain anonymous, a right, which fathers of illeg. children are still due, although this kind of fatherhood does not influence their social respect to a greater degree and not at all their possibility of being able to provide for themselves."

On the question of guardianship the investigation preferred, after legitimization, that the child had a step-father, as the best solution in all respects. When this was not possible, it seems on the one hand to be considered preferable that the child, at least while it was small, should stay with the mother. Especially if she in turn could stay in her parent's home, this was a relatively favourable solution. This view arose due to the critical approach to the different forms of boarding out, where it was thought that those who wanted to be foster parents were often so poor that they themselves would also live off the small foster-fee that the poor mothers managed to pay. The consequences were often "extreme neglect". The same problem was also sometimes maintained by the Poor Relief Board in Gävle. The investigation was, however, of the opinion that the boarded out children under the care of poor relief, were not seldom as badly or even worse off than as those privately boarded out. This, amongst other things, because the local councils sometimes instead of paying poor relief assistance to the adult needy, presented them with children against a foster-fee, in spite of the fact that they often, due to old-age and illness, could not even look after themselves. Moreover, the system of annual boarding out of children to the lowest bid at an auction, still flourished in rural areas.

Despite these seemingly repugnant alternatives, the investigation writes about the solution that the mothers bring up their children themselves:

"These mothers must often provide for themselves and their children by hard work at home, or they are for their and their children's scanty maintenance assigned to factory work or other work outside the home and must thereby leave the children for a long time without supervision, or rely on other people. The situation of these children is often so reproachable, that boarding out in many cases is preferable....."



## THE SWEDISH CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICE STUDY OF POOR RELIEF TO UNMARRIED MOTHERS

What was the reality behind what the study (above) said about society's economical sacrifices? In one section it gives an account to what degree unmarried mothers and their children received poor relief. The results are suprising. Despite the fact that the number of unmarried mothers and illeg. children increased considerably in the years 1886-1910, the number receiving assistance from poor relief decreased instead.

The study was of the opinion that the number of illeg. children in Sweden under the age of 15 in 1907, could be estimated at around 127,500 after adjustments had been made for incidental legitimation and mortality. In the same year 4,711 unmarried mothers and their 8,290 children recieved some form of assistance from poor relief i.e. 6.5% of the children. Occasional assistance is also included in the figures here. Moreover, a further 10,853 illeg. children i.e. 8.5% received direct assistance, which means they were boarded out or taken into care in some other way at the expense of poor relief.<sup>7</sup>

### UNMARRIED MOTHERS IN THE RADICAL DEBATE IN SOCIETY

The problems, which is apparent from the above, were both quantatively and qualitatively quite considerable. They were part of a complex of questions, in which unrest for the development in the population and for the moral development of the working class and its considered lack of morality, were of central interest to the conservative side. Yet, the position of illeg. children and their mothers and the quantitative growth not only concerned the pillars of society. Also many on the leftist side considered it one of the great social problems, but they were more concerned over the actual difficult situation for these women and children. However, the legislation on contraception and abortion were very sensitive subjects for a long time, and evaded by most, apart from a small very radical group of opinion, which questioned all sexual policy, with its oppression of class and women. There was a ban on the sale and advertising of contraceptives since 1910, and annually 10,000 to 20,000 illegal abortions were carried out of which many resulted in the woman dying, and more often in sterility.<sup>8</sup>

The aspiration to improve conditions for unmarried mothers was staunch above all in the early Social-Democratic women's movement. At the Social-democratic women's congresses of 1907, 1908 and 1914, these questions were a significant feature. Demands were raised for ex. for: special homes for unmarried mothers and children's nurseries close to the factories under the control of the authorities, alimony from parents in relation to each of their incomes, responsibility of the man to contribute to the maintenance of the woman in connection with confinement, maternity insurance so that the mothers themselves would be able to take care of their children, more effective regulations for the collecting of economic contributions from the fathers, introduction of advance payments if one of the parents would not or could not pay, law of inheritance from the father to illeg. children, law also for women to take the oath in child welfare cases or the cessation of the right for a man to deny paternity by taking the oath etc. Sweden's first female doctor, Karolina Widerström, held a lecture already in 1906 on unmarried mothers and illeg. children at the congress for poor relief and national insurance, where she put forward a rather similar programme. She wrote: "...those of us, who make it difficult or impossible (that a mother shall have the possibility to take care of her own child, my notation) by their harsh judgments or

<sup>7</sup> Ibid part II page 57 and 60ff, table U page 56 and table 11

<sup>8</sup> Kyle page 88, Forsman page 29ff and 60f



likewise, are accomplices with much responsibility. In order to promote the fulfillment of duty, it is necessary to have lenience towards the mother and severity towards the father, i.e. the complete opposite of what usually happens."<sup>9</sup>

The Social-Democratic women's club of the town Norrköping put forward a motion to the International Congress of Social democratic Women in 1910 that: "the Congress.....must mark all men who have abandoned women with whom they have children, as mere traitors, and appeal to all male organisations to observe this." The motion was not taken up into discussion by the Congress and was called "Mrs Anderssons monstrosity" by the newspaper, Socialdemokraten.<sup>10</sup>

Christina Carlsson shows, in her thesis on the view of women and women's policy in the Swedish social democracy 1880-1910, that the party neglected to see that there was a large group of single women with the responsibility of providing for themselves. The party never demanded an improvement in the situation for these women. Yvonne Hirdman, the newly appointed professor of women's history in Gothenburg, has a similar view in her essay on the Social-Democratic women's movement in Sweden, "The Socialist Housewife" (Den socialistiska hemmafrun). Questions such as the equality of women and child welfare were certainly discussed sometimes, but in an utopian way. These questions were to be solved in a future of socialism. In the policy of the day, the reality of the position of women was forgotten. Gradually, the party also in its ideas began to leave behind the view that a woman's liberation would be attained in becoming the man's equal in production and through collective solutions of child care and household work. The dream of the future instead became a society in which each woman was a housewife, whilst the man's wages were sufficient to provide for the whole family. The consequence was that the large differences in wages between men and women, and the idea that men needed the jobs most of all, were ideologically legitimated. Women were still only guest performers in the labour market while waiting for the joy of becoming a housewife.<sup>11</sup>

In this way social reality for thousands of women was made invisible and not regarded as politically relevant. They were placed in a situation where they instead had to live this conflict between production and reproduction in private. As Ann-Sofie Ohlander shows in "Maternity Benefits and Population Policies in Sweden" it led to a situation in parenthood, where the woman was placed in a position, where she was powerless, but still considered responsible.<sup>12</sup>

#### POOR RELIEF IN GÄVLE - CONSTRUCTION AND EXTENT 1910

Those who had power in Gävle were very proud of their poor relief system. The town applied a modified variant of the German so-called Elberfeldt system to its open (non-institutional) poor relief. The significance of this was that the town was divided into 18 districts, where, in each one, a group of poor relief assistants, led by a district chairman, were responsible for poor relief. The district groups met every fourteenth day to make decisions on assistance cases. The relief assistants were unsalaried and they were all responsible for 2-3 needy families or individuals, seeking assistance. Thus poor relief was not only concerned with giving out assistance, but it also carried out detailed social surveys, through its close insights into the conditions of the needy, the prospect of work, maintenance from other quarters etc, and also discovered changes in these conditions. Firstly, the poor were to be encouraged to work and to thrift. Those,

<sup>9</sup> Hirdman page 23ff, Forsman page 27f and 50, Widerström page 7

<sup>10</sup> Hirdman page 25

<sup>11</sup> Carlsson, Hirdman

<sup>12</sup> Ohlander



according to the assistants, who did not take the opportunity to do this, and who did not live "properly" in other respects, were excluded from assistance or taken into closed care. Secondly, assistance was granted to those who remained and handed out privately by the assistant. On the other hand, this should then be of sufficient size, guaranteeing survival along with other possible forms of income.

The system was called modified, because the open poor relief was not allowed to operate freely, as the above, but was complimented with a central system of municipal officials. This consisted of a poor relief office, run by a poor relief manager, who could control that the district's laymen did not become too generous. This occurred mostly in two ways; firstly a person applying for assistance, when the district group had recommended assistance, had to collect a so called personal book from the office. His/her personal details were then scrutinised by the officials at the office and put into the records. Secondly, the protocol of the district groups had to be passed by the poor relief board, after being examined by the poor relief manager. My impression is that this organisation made the poor relief assistants cautious and restrained, which was also probably the intention. Matters were often referred to the office and then to the board.<sup>13</sup>

During 1910, 5.06% of the population of Gävle or 1,622 people, received some form of poor relief, of which 365 were men, 601 women and 656 children. Assistance to the poor in their homes i.e. open poor relief, comprised of 850 people. Whilst more men than women were taken care of in the closed system, women were in the majority in the open system which comprised of 99 men, 378 women and 373 children.

Closed care occurred at the so-called work and charitable institution (WCI) and in accordance with this, at the mental 'pavillion' and the children's asylum. The latter was an institution for children taken into care awaiting foster-homes. Here 89 children were cared for, 95 people at the 'pavillion', and the remainder of the 554 people in closed care at the WCI. However, 104 of which stayed for such a short time that they were entered under another caption in the total statistics on poor relief. At WCI most of the poor were either not at all or hardly fit for work, due to old-age, illness, deformity or under-age. The children who were in care here, were in general very small and admitted together with their mothers. Those fit for work also were demanded to work, and it was also possible to be forced into the WCI for reasons other than inability to provide for oneself, e.g., amongst other things, debts owed to poor relief, which had to be paid off by working, and so-called improper lifestyle, for example vagrancy. Those admitted were under the guardianship of the poor relief board and they could not leave the WCI without permission from the board.<sup>14</sup>

A third form of assistance was boarding out to individuals or institutions at the expense of poor relief. This comprised of 189 persons in 1910, of which 168 were children, and mostly illeg. In total 133 people were in care at other health care institutions; infirmaries, sanatoriums, hospitals and maternity hospitals, at the expense of poor relief. As part of the organisation, there was also a home for wanderers, with regard to stopping begging in the town, and the sale of provisions and fire wood at low cost to the needy.

Scarcely one third of those receiving assistance were provided for totally, and mostly all of them were in closed care, of course. 17% only received occasional assistance. The remaining 50 per cent were, what was called partially provided for. The figures I have presented above are gross figures, regarding the number of those receiving

13 Berättelse 1912 page 30f, Reglemente, Journal för understödssökande

14 Berättelse 1910, Journal över intagna 1910



assistance throughout the year, but they have not been include twice. From the total of 1,622 recipients of assistance in 1910, 541 had departed by 31 December, of which 70 had died. Of course the greater part of the 269 people receiving occasional assistance, boarded out children who were grown up, people who had moved and those who thenceforth fended for themselves, or were considered able to do this, are included here. The remaining 1,081 show how many at a certain point in time were receiving assistance. The average cost per recipient in 1910 was 171 SEK 21 öre, but in open care the equivalent cost was 70.25.<sup>15</sup>

Alongside poor relief in local government, there were a long line of funds and societies which with the aid of donations and charity ran various social help organisations, privately governed. Amongst other things they ran a crèche and a public kindergarten, which meant working parents had somewhere to leave their children, and there were also similar afternoon homes for school children, the so called work-cottages. The milk drop society ran kinds of child welfare centres and children's homes and holiday camps were also run privately. These activities were far from large enough to correspond to the needs, but were of course of importance to those who had the opportunity to receive assistance from them. State legislation regarding child welfare before 1917 was very limited. These private organisations often received economic support from the town authorities, e.g. for the appropriation of sites. The town council also administered a long line of private donations for charitable aims. It seems that the town officials did not draw a very strict dividing line between public and private social work. The above mentioned children's homes for example were regarded to be the children's homes of the town in official publications. In time municipal and private social welfare were integrated even more.

#### POOR RELIEF IN GÄVLE'S NEWSPAPERS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CENTURY

I have examined how the local newspapers regarded poor relief. Whilst the Conservative and Liberal newspapers mostly treated poor relief in positive or neutral terms, the Social-Democratic worker's paper, *Arbetsbladet*, was strongly critical. The most usual subjects for criticism were, the coercion in poor relief, severity against those admitted and recipients of assistance, biased actions in work conflicts, e.g. by the assignment of strike-breaker work to those seeking assistance, and finally playing ball with the poor between various municipalities in disagreement over the so-called law on place of domicile. *Arbetsbladet*'s criticism is important amongst other things because the Social-Democrats, as previously mentioned, seized political power in the town in 1919. Possibilities arise here of comparing these criticisms with future practical policy, because it is often apparent from the articles in *Arbetsbladet* how poor relief is to be reformed.

What picture do the newspapers then give of poor relief in Gävle? What most strikes me is the much discussed phenomenon of coercion, which does not occur so clearly in the other source material. Coercion is not only commented upon in the critical articles in *Arbetsbladet* - it is also mentioned in the miscellaneous daily-news items in all the newspapers. There were stories about people who had been taken into care by force, who had run away from there but been brought back or had been refused to leave the institution because they must first pay off their debt to poor relief. The latter according to *Arbetsbladet*, occurred even in cases when the person admitted thereby had failed to secure promised work or had been taken away from a job he/she already had.

<sup>15</sup> Berättelser 1910 and 1912



A much discussed case was that of an unmarried mother who was taken away from her job as a shop assistant in Stockholm and taken by force to Gävle to be made to work at the WCI for her two under-age children who were still in care at the expense of poor relief. She lodged an appeal with the Swedish Supreme Administrative Court and pointed out that her work for poor relief was so badly valued, that it was not sufficient to keep herself and her children, and moreover to pay off her debt. She would thus have to, she thought, stay at the WCI until the children had become adult. The Court decided on formal grounds not to pronounce a verdict, but it found the woman irreproachable and the judgment was interpreted in the press as the poor relief board getting a scolding. After 3 months, the woman was allowed back to her job with the promise from her employer to take care of her and keep an eye on her conduct, and to see that a sum was paid monthly for the children's maintenance.

In connection with this case the chairman of the poor relief board made a statement in case this was the treatment unmarried mothers had to expect from poor relief. He denied that it was the case and wrote: "As a rule, it is so that, the first time a unmarried mother has recourse to poor relief, the board cannot solely have reason for indulgence, but it can also find reason to lend a helping hand, when the mother so deserves, in order to put her into a position where she herself can take care of her children. But it should be clear that the board has to act somewhat differently towards mothers, who bring child after child into this world, by different fathers and in various places..." and incidentally about boarding out: "a most natural thing and closest at hand is to 'board out' children with their own mothers. As sad as it is, it is nevertheless seldom that this can be done, for the board must primarily superintend that the child whilst growing up is kept away from repulsiveness, which arises in a bad environment."

Another usual problem seems to have been that married men left their families and therefore caused expense for poor relief in providing for them. Several cases where such men were brought home can be seen in the records. In connection with articles about the enlistment of emigrants to Canada, there were complaints that families had been left without means. The manager of poor relief in Gävle also severely attacked the Salvation Army in Stockholm, and it was thought that its night-refuge constituted a place of sanctuary for negligent husbands.

Severity against those seeking assistance in open care and those admitted into closed care was a recurrent theme in *Arbetsbladet*. The officials were accused of behaving rudely to the applicants for assistance e.g. by shouting at them as if they were criminals, so that many would rather starve than turn to poor relief and "humiliate oneself before the high gents at the poor relief office who seem to regard every non-superior as a lackey." Even when it was assistance of a privileged kind, like benefits to mobilised soldiers families, the officials were said to have assumed that they were dealing with mere frauds and they inundated those seeking this assistance with all kinds of abusive language. The catering was also criticised at the WCI e.g. the meals sometimes where old, mouldy and dry bread boiled in grease, and those who refused to eat this got no food at all. Other complaints were brutality from the superintendent and the staff at the WCI, a working day which was longer than the normal in society, starvation during illness and compulsory devotions, held by the above mentioned "tormentor", the superintendent.

The type of poor relief *Arbetsbladet* seems to want instead can be briefly described in the following clause: Human officials and other staff, who see themselves as serving the poor instead of being their masters. The newspaper thinks that the needy must be treated as respectable people with a right to assistance, when they no longer can provide for themselves. It also wanted some form of controlling



authority to which the clients could turn with their complaints. The attitude of the Conservative and Liberal newspapers to poor relief is very different. There are on the one hand defenceless and grateful wards, whose eyes sparkle when the good-hearted authorities provide them with a beautiful address, an excursion or coffee and buns. On the other hand, there is a constant suspicion that workshy and immoral elements try to live the life of a vagrant at the expense of the town.<sup>16</sup>

#### SINGLE MOTHERS IN 1910 - OCCURENCE IN THE POOR RELIEF REGISTER AND ANNUAL REPORTS

What percentage of the women in my study of 1910 received poor relief? I have looked for them in the paid-out assistance records register, regarding the years 1892-1918. Only if they themselves as adults have been the recipients of assistance, have they been included in my figures. From table 4 it is apparent how many from various categories have been refound in the records, and their percentage of all those in the study of a corresponding category. No difference is made here between open and closed care, or between continuous and occassional assistance.

Table 4

Single mothers with under-age children in Gävle 1910 refound in the paid out assistance records register 1892-1918, and their percentage of the total numbers in my groups of investigation.

	number in register	% of total number
unmarried mothers	89	27.8
widows with illeg. children	30	76.7
other widows with children	78	43.3
all widows with children	108	49.3
divorcees with children	8	50.0

Sources: Register till liggare (register of paid-out assistance records) 1892-1918. Utdrag ur församlingsbok (excerpts from the parish books for the census) Gävleborgs län 1910 nr 55 and 56.

A greater proportion of those previously married than those unmarried received poor relief. With regard to the unmarried and the divorced, there is little difference between those relocated in the registers and the rest of these groups in the study in such areas as occupation, age, children's age etc. The average number of children is however somewhat higher for those in the register. Amongst the widows there is, as expected a considerable domination of working class widows who were among those receiving assistance. The entire 64% of these have been found in the registers as against 17.4% of widows from other social categories.

In the poor relief board's annual report there are statistics which show the number of recipients of assistance, classified into gender, civil status and with or without children for a certain year. I have calculated the annual average figures for the period 1906-1915 for the number of recipients of assistance with under-age children. See table

<sup>16</sup> Arbetarbladet 18/5 1910, 7/2-13, 11/2 13, 5/6-14, 20/8-14, 21/8-14, 20/3-19, 15/4-19, 26/9-19, 8/10-19, Gefle Posten 4/11-14, Norrlandsposten 28/1 1898, 11/10-99, 12/1 1906, 7/11-12, Gefle Dagblad 8/2 1900, 18/1-13, 11/2-13, Stockholmstidningen 5/11-12, Aftonbladet 10/2-13, Dagens Nyheter 10/2 1899, 16/2-99



5. Observe that it concerns adults who take care of their children, i.e. children boarded out are not included.

Table 5

Adults with under-age children who have received poor relief assistance in Gävle during the years 1906-1915. Annual average.

	men	women	their children
unmarried	0	25	39
formerly married	2	73	189
married	44	81	269

Sources: Berättelse om Gefle Stads fattigvård (Annual reports from the poor relief board of Gävle) under åren 1906-1915.

If the figures in table 5 are compared with the total number of widows and unmarried mothers with children respectively, in the town in 1910, it is apparent that the percentage of recipients of assistance amongst the latter is strikingly less than amongst the widows. On average 31% of the previously married women with children received some form of assistance each year, and the corresponding figure for the unmarried women is hardly 8%. Nevertheless, the widows of the town were found in all strata of society, whilst the unmarried mothers almost exclusively belonged to the poorer classes. The difference is even more striking if one considers that there are many more unmarried mothers who had left their children, potentially needing assistance to be able to take care of their children.

If the year 1910 is scrutinised more closely, we can see that 70 previously married women with children received poor relief, in comparison to the sum total of 116 previously married women in my study, who were found in the register for the whole period 1892-1918. The corresponding figures for the unmarried mothers are 26 and 89 respectively. It seems probable that this is all connected to the extent of assistance and the length of time of assistance. In other words, a relatively large percentage (27.8%, table 4) of the unmarried mothers received assistance at some time, but this was often occasional, whilst the previously married mother's assistance was more continuous. The annual figures in table 5 should then concern, to a large extent, the same people amongst the widows and the divorcees, for the different years, whilst it should be the opposite for the unmarried mothers.

I have previously mentioned that women constituted a large proportion of the recipients of the assistance in total. Approx. half of this is due to the large number of women in the group recipients of assistance with children. The rest is due to the considerable preponderance of widows to widowers. Despite this, men were, as has been seen, in the clear majority in the closed care. A dislike of supporting men in open care can be suspected; it is mainly a form of care for women and children. It is interesting to examine whether this preference for open care involved all categories of women.

Note also the great preponderance of women amongst married people in table 5. Normally families came under the man's name in the records on poor relief assistance. It seems probable therefore that the many wives without husbands in the table are largely identical with the deserted wives in the previous section.

To have received poor relief at some time is an all too obtuse criterion for a comparison between different categories. It is necessary to know what kind of assistance was involved and how much and for how long. I have done a test investigation of this kind on a part of my material. I shall call this test group the pilot sample. It consists of 35 unmarried mothers, 27 widows and 7 divorcees. This sample does in no respect differ dramatically from the main body of source i.e. all the single mothers found in the poor relief register.

#### ON THE COST OF LIVING AND THE LEVEL OF INCOME

The intension here is not to give an account of the income for each individual for various years, but just to give a general picture of the level of income in the group of single mothers in general and in the pilot sample, and to compare this with some average worker's incomes and with prices of various groceries and house rent.

In order to receive a taxable income, one had to earn more than 500 SEK a year. Those who earned below this sum are not recorded as having any income at all. For incomes between 500 and 1200 SEK there was a basic deduction of 450 SEK. Between 1200 and 1800 the deduction was 300 SEK. Table 6 refers to these taxable incomes, no income really means below 500 SEK, and a taxable income of 250 SEK means a yearly income of 700 SEK.

Table 6

Taxable income 1911 for the pilot sample and a selection of the single mothers in Gävle 1910 who had not received poor relief assistance. In a few cases, who have not been found in the record of 1911, the records of 1910 or 1912 have been used instead). Percentage.

	no income	up to 250 SEK	more
receivers of poor relief assistance i.e. pilot sample			
unmarried	76.9	23.1	
previously married	96.2	3.8	
have not received poor relief assistance			
unmarried	65.0	15.0	
previously married	50.0	31.3	

Sources: Uppbörds- och debiteringslängder (tax and debit-entry records) för Gävle stad, 1910, 1911 and 1912.

The single mothers have, as have been seen, incomes mostly below the tax line, 500 SEK. Those who had not received poor relief at any time are on average placed a little higher on the scale than the people in the pilot sample. Therein, there are consequently unmarried mothers who are a little better off, whilst not many of the previously married in the pilot sample succeeded in crawling above the 500 SEK line (i.e. the 0 level in the table).

These levels can be suitably compared with some examples of taxable incomes in some common occupations. Women: shop assistants 150-550 SEK, cigar factory workers 170-350, seamstresses 50-150. In many common women's occupations like ironers, cleaners and maids it was quite unusual that they obtained any taxable level of income.

Some male taxable incomes: docker approx. 350 SEK, mechanic 400-800, saw operator approx. 1,000, heavy labourer 250-350, coachman 150-350, tramdriver 600, engine driver 2,750, elementary school teacher 2,370.

In the records of those seeking assistance, where most are widows with or without children, the declared incomes are very small, often



nothing at all, otherwise usually below 10 SEK a week. Most of them lived in so-called chimney-stove rooms, i.e. one single room heated by an iron stove. The rent for such a room was around 100 SEK a year.

Poor relief bought groceries by so-called contract by tender. Some of these were later shared out as assistance in kind or sold to the needy, for the same prices as they were purchased for, which ought to have meant, considerably lower prices than in open retail trade. These poor relief prices in 1910 were: pork per kg 1 SEK 28 öre, rye flour per kg 16 öre, potatoes per litre 4 öre, herring per kg 25 öre, wheat flour per kg 26 öre, bread per kg 26 öre, peas per litre 18 öre and margarine per kg 1 SEK 20 öre. On average the prices are about 1/50 of today's prices.<sup>17</sup>

#### POOR RELIEF TO THOSE IN THE PILOT SAMPLE

I have of course only included assistance which was given to families at the time the mother was single and had under-age children. After having first made calculations for the whole period 1892-1918, I have limited the investigation in this presentation to the years 1906-1915. This is partly due to the fact that inflation was so high during the First World War and I therefore else would be forced to make complex index calculations. In 1906-1915, the changes in prices are temperate. A long period of investigation also leads to an overrepresentation of widows before 1906 and of unmarried mothers after 1915, when many of the widows no longer had under-age children.

In table 7 I have calculated how much assistance of various kinds the categories in the pilot sample received on average in the period 1906-1915. Observe that I have calculated admission to the WCI in days, whilst under the other captions the amount of SEK paid out are calculated. There was certainly a tariff for the calculation of costs for admission in the accounts, one SEK a day for adults and 50 öre for children, but I think that admission to the WCI is so qualitatively distinct from assistance in the home that such an estimation of admissions would be pointless in the table.

17 Uppbördslängder 1910-1912, Kunglig förordning angående bevilning 1910, Journal över understödssökande, Journal över intagna 1910

Table 7

Average poor relief assistance per family to the different categories of the pilot sample during the whole period 1906-1915. Admission to the WCI in days, other types of assistance in SEK and öre. Observe that the figures apply to the whole ten-year period and not annually.

kinds	Admitted to		boarding out	payment to	assistance	other
assist-	WCI in days		of children	child care	in home	of
ance:hospit-			in SEK	committee	in SEK	
tal,funeral				in SEK		
mother child						etc.in SEK
unmarried	149	135	25.35	0	84.90	11.46
widows						
without	0	0	0	27.52	865.97	19.90
illeg.						
widows						
with	0	0	3.64	0	806.49	118.54
illeg.						
divor-						
cees	14	320	400.90	189.29	247.50	52.27

Sources: Liggare över utbetalda understöd (paid-out assistance records) 1892-1918.

The table clearly shows how differently the widows and the unmarried mothers were treated. The principal measure against unmarried women with children was to admit them to the WCI, and to do the same with their children. None of the widows in the pilot sample or their children were ever admitted to the WCI. The widows received instead approx. ten times as much assistance in the home than the unmarried mothers. The assistance to the widows were no great sums either. Often they were payed 4 or 5 SEK every other week, but in most cases they got this assistance quite constant. There are not many divorcees. However, they seemed to have occupied an intermediate position between unmarried mothers and widows, judging from the figures. There seems to be no significant difference between the widows with and without illeg. children.

Of course, the numbers are considerably affected sometimes in small sample groups by the extreme set of figures of certain individuals. These main tendencies mentioned above, have, however, nothing to do with this. On the contrary, it is so, that if the three unmarried mothers who received the highest level of assistance in the home, should not be included in the calculations, then the remaining 32 would receive 25 SEK in assistance on average, i.e. less than a third compared to the table. Corresponding manoeuvres with the three widows receiving the most assistance does not, however, lead to any dramatic change in the averages. A corresponding table to nr 8 but for the whole period 1892-1918 would yield similar results, concerning the essential pattern, but the sums are then of course considerably higher.

An interesting supplementary source in this context is the poor relief manager's diary (whilst on duty). When people have directly turned to him, he has noted the purpose, prospective accounts and sometimes measures. There are a large number of unmarried mothers with children



here, who are without maintenance. In the regular records of those seeking assistance, however, which contains the questions put to the needy at the office, i.e. to those who had passed through the eye of the needle of the district care assistants, and their answers, there are hardly any unmarried mothers. This can indicate that on a district level, they were reluctant to take on unmarried mothers as recipients of assistance on their own responsibility, and instead these mothers had to turn directly to the poor relief manager.

#### WOMEN WITH CHILDREN ADMITTED TO THE POOR RELIEF INSTITUTION IN 1910

Throughout 1910 there were 17 unmarried mothers admitted in total, together with their 21 children. This can be compared the fact that in total during 1910 26 unmarried mothers with 36 children received some form of poor relief. In the same year, three widows were admitted with the same number of children, and this was also the case for nine wives with 20 children. The most common cause for the admission of the unmarried women was confinement and illness after confinement. A common cause was also inability to provide for oneself. Amongst the widows and wives, such inability and illness were the most common reasons. On average the unmarried women were admitted for 166 days, but 4 had been there the whole year and 9 remained at the turn of the year. 8 of the unmarried mothers' children had then been boarded out or placed in a children's asylum, 4 had died, 5 were discharged and only 4 remained at the WCI.<sup>10</sup>

#### SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS ON THE CONDITIONS IN 1910

The widows with under-age children received assistance at home if they were very poor. This was meagre, but generally regular. They were seldom taken into closed care. The unmarried mothers, however, received assistance in open poor relief to a very small extent. They had to turn directly to the poor relief office, and if then the officials felt they had to help them, it occurred by admitting them to the WCI. To a large degree it seems to have concerned girls in acute situations connected to an approaching deliverance. From the WCI the children then often seems to have been replaced in an asylum, whilst waiting to be boarded out by the poor relief board.

It seems comprehensible that the unmarried mothers avoided turning to poor relief as long as possible. It cannot have been an attractive prospect for a young girl to be admitted to the WCI and to come under the guardianship of poor relief, without knowing for certain when she could come out again. The WCI was otherwise inhabited mostly by the aged, the sick and the physically and mentally severe handicapped. If Arbetarbladets conception of the regime at the WCI is true, then it should seemed even more awful.

I can conclude that poor relief regarding the unmarried mothers functioned primarily in a repressive, negative and fearful way. There is not much in my material to support the chairman's speech about lending a helping hand so the mother could keep her child.

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